

F

1273

1275

Chap.

482
P3

Character and Reward of a Just Man.

A

FUNERAL DISCOURSE,

COMMEMORATIVE OF THE LIFE, AND VIRTUES,
OF THE LATE

HON. STEPHEN VAN RENSSELAER.

DELIVERED AT OGDENSBURGH,
FEBRUARY 17, 1839,

BY
THE REV. WILLIAM BARLOW,
RECTOR OF ST. JOHN'S CHURCH.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

ALBANY:

PRINTED BY PACKARD, VAN BENTHUYSEN AND CO.

.....

1839.

Library

City of Wash.

F123
.V29

of God, and the blessings in store for him. If these passages do not glow with a spiritual meaning, I know not where we can find any that do. Full of instruction and comfort, they describe a character which we are to acquire ; and promise rewards, which, on that condition, we shall enjoy.

I. In the CHARACTER of the righteous man, as here sketched by the Prophet, five particulars are noticed, namely ; his piety, his wisdom, his social justice, his political integrity, and his prudence. In the inspired writings, a precept specifying a particular action, in its spirit often includes a great principle ; and all the kindred actions which come within its scope. This rule of interpretation is illustrated by our Lord, in his comments on the commandments, instanced in his sermon on the mount. The rule applies in the case before us : for each of these traits of character, embraces a principle that is “ exceeding broad.” The description is as follows. “ He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly ; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil.”

“HE WALKETH RIGHTEOUSLY.” This denotes the rectitude of his character in general, and his piety towards God in particular. He conforms in his inward disposition, and outward behavior, to the eternal rule of righteousness—the will of God, as expressed in his law. This implies that he knows God aright, and is at peace with Him; that he is instructed in the Law, and like the happy man of the Psalmist, delights to meditate therein day and night; that his mind is imbued with that fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom; and his heart inspired with that love of Him, which is the fountain of all virtue. Directed by these rules, influenced by these sentiments, he honors his Maker by every instance of piety; and endeavors to please Him by every work of obedience. This single purpose, to please God in all things, growing out of filial love, and directed by an enlightened judgment, furnishes him with a better solution of questions of duty, than all the principles of casuistry in the world: as a test, it is easy of application; as a motive, it is as effective in the privacy of the closet, as in the presence of the world. In the same degree that a right spirit is renewed within

Ogdensburgh, Feb. 18th, 1839.

TO HENRY VAN RENSSELAER, Esq.

Dear Sir,—

The discourse, of which you have done me the honor to request a copy, is placed at your disposal. It was written, as you are aware, without a view to its publication, with an imperfect acquaintance with the subject, and in too much haste to admit of my doing it justice. I regret that it is not more worthy of the favor with which you are pleased to regard it. Accept it as an humble evidence of the veneration with which the blessed memory of your FATHER is cherished, by myself, in common with all who can appreciate his virtues. That a happiness like his may attend you; and that in God's time, you may attain to his reward, is the earnest wish and prayer, of

Your affectionate friend and Pastor,

WM. BARLOW.

SERMON.

ISAIAH XXXIII. 15, 16, 17.

“HE that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil.

“He shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure.

“Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty; they shall behold the land that is very far off.”

IF we were to admit, as several commentators suppose, that the primary reference of these promises, was to the deliverance of the Jews from the great distress to which they were reduced by the Assyrian invasion, and the security and plenty they would enjoy, when the siege of Jerusalem should be raised; still it would be allowable to understand them to refer, in a more important sense, to the rewards of the righteous in both

worlds. In the Old Testament, the passages are numerous which have this double reference. But in this case, the local allusion can hardly be admitted : it would attach to these sublime and glowing descriptions, a feeble, if not an absurd meaning. The Prophet must have intended to say, that the just man described in the 15th verse, and he only, should enjoy the promises in the two following verses. But if the promises referred to the blessings of returning peace, it is plain that the wicked would share them in common with the good. When the perfect man is described, and he is told, that “he shall dwell on high, that his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks ; that his eyes shall see the King in his beauty, and behold the land that is very far off ;” something more is meant, I apprehend, than that he shall dwell within the walls of the city, see King Hezekiah in his robes of state, and be at liberty to walk or ride out into the country ! The promises are peculiar to the character specified, and both belong to the Just in all ages. It would be difficult for genius to invent terms, which in so small a compass, would so graphically and beautifully pourtray the man

him, sin loses its hold upon the affections, and its power over the will : It is feared, forsaken, and hated. He can say with David, “Thy Law have I hid in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee.” Setting the Lord always before his eyes, he makes a straight path for his feet, “He keeps innocency and takes heed unto the thing that is right, knowing that *that* only can bring him peace at the last.”

“HE SPEAKETH UPRIGHTLY.” Or as the original has it; he “speaketh *uprightnesses*.” This implies that he is in possession of the truth, and that his words conform to it. A lover of all wisdom, and especially of that which is from above, he seeks for it as for hid treasures; and receives it with readiness of mind. Taught of God, he is filled with “the spirit of wisdom and understanding, and counsel, and true knowledge,” and out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh. He avoids the vices of the tongue; all profanity and cursing, all lying and equivocation, all slander and rash judgments, all impure and provoking language, because the fountain of these bitter waters is not in him. His words indicate that reverence for God which he truly feels; conform

to the truth which he loves ; and breathe the kindly spirit which animates his bosom. Dictated by discretion, they are fitly spoken ; and seasoned with grace, they minister it to the hearer. This single trait of character, denotes a high degree of moral excellence. He that speaketh uprightnesses, will not only tell the truth ; but “ he will speak of excellent things, and the opening of his mouth will be right things.” He is “ the perfect man” of St. James, who “ offends not in word ;” for he takes heed that nothing should escape him, contrary to religion, sincerity, and charity. He is the “ good man” described by our Lord, “ who out of the good treasury of the heart, bringeth forth good things”—things “ profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness.” Folly accounts words as wind ;—wisdom regards them as the most weighty and imperishable things in nature. Words are the instruments of the moral power ; and sway nations more potently than sceptres.—Words achieve triumphs that armies could not ; and endure when pyramids decay. The words of wisdom are more precious than gems ; and scatter blessings, as the heavens shed dew. But

“evil communications” wound more fatally than daggers ; they blight virtues that would have triumphed in a dungeon, or on the rack ;—they kill the soul. That then is truly a wisdom from above which teaches us to keep the door of our lips and to make all our words *uprightnesses*.

“HE DESPISETH THE GAIN OF OPPRESSIONS.”

This characteristic includes the great principle of *justice* between man and man. Far from oppressing any by violence, the just man will not do it under the sanction of the Law—nor will he withhold the rights of the poor, because he may do it legally—nor will he press his own rights, when it would take their little morsel, to add to his own superfluities—nor will he withhold *good* from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of his hand to do it : for whatever he might acquire, or retain, by these means, he would despise as the gain of oppressions. The cruelty which he would despise in himself he contemns in others ; for he is not one of the multitude, who pay their brutish homage to wealth, however it may have been won, or abused. His sense of justice, and his feelings of humanity, would impel him to make common cause with the injured ; and

to do whatever he might, like Job, to “break the jaws of the oppressor, and pluck the prey out of his teeth.” In the parable of the two debtors, the oppressor proceeded on the ground of a legal right ; and for aught that appears, strictly according to the forms of the statute ; but the common master of both, gave judgment, not merely according to law, nor simply according to equity, but according to the *mercy* which the case required. “Thou oughtest” said he “to have had *compassion* on thy fellow servant.” He had judgment without mercy therefore, because he had showed no mercy. This teaches us that the principles of justice, as settled by the decrees of Heaven’s Chancery, spread over the whole field of human sufferings, and wants ; and embrace every claim of mercy, and benevolence, as well as of Law. They not only forbid us to oppress our neighbor by violence, or to invade his rights as defined by our civil codes ; but they require us to do to him, as far as our means will permit, the good which his necessities may call for. And our Lord’s account of the solemnities of the Last day, shows that the judgment will then turn on our fulfilment, or neglect of these requirements.

When, therefore, the poor cry, the needy, and him that hath no helper, the just man will regard relief, as a debt, rather than a gratuity. He will not reserve his tears, and his bounties, exclusively for the sufferers on the other side of the globe; but will find in the forms of wretchedness around him, claims upon his resources, to which God has affixed his own sign manual. He will not reject the claimant because he may have been vicious, or improvident; for he will remember that if none find mercy but the deserving, none will find it.

“HE SHAKETH HIS HANDS FROM HOLDING OF BRIBES.” Here the just man is presented in an official character; and the abhorrence of corrupt practices, intimated by shaking from his hand the wages of iniquity, when they are thrust into it, shows that in the exercise of his public functions, he is governed by a principle of *political integrity*. An upright magistrate, inaccessible to direct bribery, he takes care that no corrupting influence may reach him, by any bye-paths of prejudice, or favoritism, or hope, or fear; and administers justice with firmness and impartiality. As a legislator, he will not be found desecrating his sa-

cred office, by lending himself to a system of party legislation, though that condition might be the tenure of his dignities and emoluments. As a statesman, the ends he aims at, will be “his God’s, his country’s, and truth’s.” Pure himself, he will not connive at the corruption of others, for the sake of their patronage. Choosing obscurity rather than dishonor, he is incapable of sacrificing principle, at the shrine of party. Honest, as well as patriotic, he could not be tempted to pollute his hands with the spoils of his country, though speculation may have become the order of the day; and infamy have ceased to be infamous. How essential it is to the welfare of nations, that such men alone should bear rule, the history of the past abundantly testifies. It is then only that the people rejoice; it is then only that virtue is admitted into high places; and that nations become strong in wisdom and justice.—How difficult it is to sustain such men in power, the history of the future will show. When they who confer office, prefer flattery to truth; they who are willing to pay the price, will win the prize: and they who will neither receive a bribe, nor offer one, must for the most part, be content

with an honorable obscurity ; until those great emergencies arise, which call forth talents and worth from their retirement. When a People are ignorant and vicious, they prefer men after their own hearts ; who, by the just appointment of God, presently become their scourges. That religion then is the only security of nations, which can make the people wise and understanding, and the magistrate just.

“HE STOPPETH HIS EARS FROM HEARING OF BLOOD, AND SHUTTETH HIS EYES FROM SEEING EVIL.” This implies that he prudently avoids the causes of error—all temptations and occasions to sin. Two instances of caution are specified, which were peculiarly apposite, in the age of anarchy and violence in which the prophet lived ; and are not wholly inapplicable, in this day of agitation, and popular frenzy. But the principle involved in these specifications, is what we are particularly concerned to notice ; namely, the principle inculcated by our Lord, in the precept, “ Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.” This is the crowning excellence of the just man, and the safe-guard of them all. Conscious of his own infirmities, and aware of the

seductive influence of evil examples, solicitation, and opportunity, he foresees the evil and hides himself, where the foolish pass on, and are punished. Accustomed to pray, "Lead us not into temptation,"—he takes care not to run, whither he would not wish to be led; thus avoiding, if possible, the trial, to which his virtue and firmness might prove unequal. As he whose garments are white and clean, instinctively avoids any impure contact; so he who is clothed in innocency, shuns whatever might stain, if it did not rend his spotless robe. Knowing that to see sin, or even to entertain a thought of it, tends to blunt that quick moral sensibility, which is the soul's first and surest defence; he endeavors to close each avenue by which temptation might enter; "he stoppeth his ears—and shutteth his eyes," and evinces the stern and virtuous purpose of his mind, by shunning the imminent cause of all sin and ruin, the *first step* in the path which leads to them. This attitude of firm resistance to all dangers from without, implies that equal attention is paid to the state of the heart, from whence still greater dangers arise. He who loves sin, will delight in being tempted, he will

parley with temptation, and presently he cannot choose but to go all the length of compliance. There is, therefore, no security for the Christian, until the love of sin is expelled from the heart: he will then possess his soul in peace; for the traitors within, will have been driven out.

How beautiful is this character of the righteous man, as sketched by the Phrophet! Like Enoch, walking with God, he walks righteously. He hath truth in his heart; grace is poured upon his lips; and in his tongue is the law of kindness. Just in his dealings, he gives to all their due; and deeming mercy the most sacred of debts, his hands are ever open to the needy. Uncorrupt in office, he administers justice without partiality or fear; and unwarpd by private ends, he consults only the honor of God, and the welfare of his species. In the meekness of wisdom, he leans upon Him who is mighty; and while he shuns the needless trial, stands firm in those which God ordains for him. Such a character can be formed only under the sanctifying influence of revealed truth, when received in the love thereof, and held by a firm and confiding faith. It is the “new creation” of Him who hath said,

“a new heart will I give you, and will put my spirit within you.” Had Philosophy conceived such a character, it could not have given it a perfect form, and a vital energy. Its instruments were inadequate : its precepts were defective ; its authority questionable ; and its hopes dubious. It theorized beautifully of virtue ; but could not renovate a heart alienated from the life of God. Nothing less than “the renewing of the Holy Ghost” can reimpress the divine image upon the soul of man, and thoroughly furnish him for every good word and work.

II. The REWARDS promised to the righteous man, in our text, respect both worlds ; and are included in five specifications, namely ; his ecclesiastical privileges ; his safety under the divine protection ; the provision made for his temporal wants ; the vision and fruition of God ; and immortality in Heaven. “He shall dwell on high : his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks : bread shall be given him ; his waters shall be sure. Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty ; they shall behold the land that is very far off.”

“HE SHALL DWELL ON HIGH.” If, as some suppose, this promise primarily referred to a lite-

ral residence on Mount Zion, still we may understand it to have a mystical reference, to the Church of the Messiah, of which that mountain was a type. David represents admission into Christ's kingdom, under that notion. "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?" he asks, "and who shall stand in his holy place? Even he that hath clean hands and a pure heart." St. Paul employs the same figure for the same purpose: "But ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem . . . and to the general assembly and church of the first-born." To dwell on high then, is to be a member of the church of Christ. To be truly so, is to occupy a position of high moral dignity and blessedness: It is to enter with God into a covenant of life, ordered in all things and sure, by virtue of which, we are made subjects of his kingdom; children of his family; partakers of pardon, peace, and grace; and heirs of glory, honor, and immortality. It is to rise above the grovelling pleasures and sordid pursuits of the world, into a region of purer air, and brighter prospects; to a higher calling, and a nobler companionship; where the saints of all ages, and ho-

ly beings of both worlds, form one brotherhood—a temple reared for the habitation of God, through the spirit. Well might our Lord exclaim—“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven!” The poor in spirit alone have the wisdom to discern that kingdom, the humility to enter into it, and the grace to adorn it. And happy indeed they are; for its privileges and honors are theirs—its promises and joys are theirs, and its triumphs and rewards shall be theirs.

“**HIS PLACE OF DEFENCE SHALL BE THE MUNITIONS OF ROCKS.**” The phrase “munitions of rocks,” literally means, a strong hold or place of security, fenced in with rocks; a walled city, or fortress. Here is doubtless an allusion to Him whom Moses calls “a Rock;” whom David celebrates as his “Rock, his fortress, and high Tower;” and whom Jeremiah addresss as “his strength, and fortress, and refuge in the day of affliction.” This then is a promise that God, the Redeemer, the Rock of Ages, sure and steadfast forever, shall be the defence of the righteous man; enclosing him around, like the walls of an impregnable strong-hold. He is under the pro-

tection of the sleepless vigilance, the deathless love, the immutable truth, the resistless power of his Creator. Who then shall harm this prisoner of hope? His "inbred sin?" No verily: The old man is crucified with Christ; and the body of sin is destroyed. His spiritual foes? Certainly not: God shall bruise Satan under his feet; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against him: His outward enemies? Never: He need not fear what man can do unto him: "God will hide him privily by his own presence, from the provoking of all men; and keep him secretly in his pavilion from the strife of tongues." Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay; in all these things he is more than conqueror through Him that hath loved him.

"BREAD SHALL BE GIVEN HIM; HIS WATERS SHALL BE SURE." If we understand this promise spiritually, it will hold true. While God is his Fortress, he shall eat the bread of life; and "with joy draw water out of the wells of salvation."—No foes can cut off his supplies: "In the days of famine he shall be satisfied." It probably refers, however, to the temporal blessings of life;

and if so, our Lord has given us a parallel promise: "Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." We could expect nothing less from infinite fulness, and infinite love: for He that will give grace and glory, will withhold no good thing from them that walk uprightly. The outward prosperity of the just man, is not, however, more the special reward, than the natural consequence of his virtues; which all conduce to health, pleasure, and long life; to success in business, and promotion to honor. This is conformable to experience: "I have been young," said David, "and now am old; yet have I never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." Were we to collect the results of our own observations, they would corroborate the reflection of the sage, and verify the promise of the Prophet. Whom have we ever known to derive any permanent or real good from vice, which virtue would not have yielded? Who, that has attained to prosperity, has not owed his success, under God, to well-doing? When have we ever seen the upright and prudent sink into irremediable misfortune? The good man may indeed be stricken with poverty

and sickness. God may bereave, and men may oppress him; whensoever it may please infinite Wisdom to mark him out that path to the wealth and bliss of immortality. But in the ordinary course of Providence, that is true of virtue, which Solomon has affirmed of Wisdom; "Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honor." . . . "Exalt her, and she shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honor when thou dost embrace her." Let all then, and especially the young, remember that the path of religion alone can conduct them, safely and surely, to prosperity. If they cannot attain it in this way, where they may walk in all the security of innocence, where every virtue tends to their advancement, and where the friendship and promises of God are their guaranty; they cannot surely attain it in any other. Sin may make fair promises, but its ways will be found hard, its pleasures deceitful, and its end death. But the temporal advantages of virtue are the smallest that attach to it. There is a reward for it hereafter.

"**THINE EYES SHALL SEE THE KING IN HIS BEAUTY.**" The truth asserted in a thousand promises, is implied in this; that the just shall sur-

vive after death, in a state of perfect happiness. More than the heir of all the sceptres of the earth, he is the heir of immortality. Invincible by death itself, that dreaded change is but a transition from this prison-house of sin and sorrow, to the freedom and citizenship of Heaven. To see God is often represented in Scripture, as the circumstance which constitutes the bliss of that state. To *see* the immaterial Deity, with a material eye, must be forever impossible ; but it is not impossible that some new sense may be there developed, which shall give to the dwellers in that world, such a consciousness of his presence,—such a perception of his infinite perfection, grace and excellence,—such means of communion and intimacy with him, as we are now incapable of. We now contemplate Him veiled in “clouds and darkness ;” and comprehending little of his mysterious counsels ; and weak in faith ; we seem to perceive in his dispensations causes of complaint, distrust and dread. But there we shall see Him as He is, in all the beauty and glory of His wisdom, mercy and truth. Here, He is the unseen, silent, absconding object of a hesitating faith, and a desponding obedience,—if we look

for Him we cannot perceive Him ; if we speak to Him he answers not ; we seek Him, but cannot apprehend Him. But there faith will be lost in sight, and hope in fruition ; and God will be with men, the present, visible, responding Parent, dwelling among the children of his love. They shall “see God,” in the sense which that expression often bears in the Scriptures ; *they shall enjoy Him*. They who dwell near that Fountain and Centre of all good, cannot but find “in His presence fulness of joy, and at His right hand pleasures forever more.”

“**THEY SHALL BEHOLD THE LAND THAT IS VERY FAR OFF.**” How unlike this little world of ours, rolling darkly on this cold and distant frontier of Jehovah’s dominion, is that land afar off, which He hath fitted up for the habitation of his throne, and the metropolis of his Empire ! What deformities mar the beauties of this world ! What storms disturb its repose ! What poisons bloom with its sweets ! What sorrows mingle with its few and transient pleasures ! What a sad portion of toils, and pains, and sins, and griefs, and sicknesses, and deaths, is entailed upon its children ! And yet this is a beautiful world ; abound-

ing with evidences of the Creator's wisdom ; and full of the blessings of goodness. How much more excellent in beauty then must be that world where none of the evils exist, which are here essential conditions of our probation ;

“ Where joys unseen by mortal eyes,
Or reason's feeble ray,
In ever blooming prospects rise,
Unconscious of decay”—

Where all is bright, and pure, and good; fit for the abode of just men made perfect ; and worthy of the High and lofty One, who dwells in that holy place. Beautiful land of the nightless day, and the stormless sky, of the living waters, and the tree of life ! Happy land, where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest ; and the just drink their cup of joy unmingled with bitterness ! Land of the Blessed, where Angels congregate that excel in strength ; and the wise and good, gathered from distant Worlds, dwell together in harmony and bliss ! “ Afar off ” it is indeed, for immeasurable tracts of space separate this world of sorrow, from that world of joy. “ Very far off ” it may seem to us, while we pursue our weary pilgrimage thitherward, and fatigue our longing

eyes in vain, to catch a gleam of its distant light. But it is near, if we consider how few are the steps that must bring us to the grave ; and how swift are the Angel wings that will convey us from thence, to the gates of the eternal city, and the chambers of light ! There is the Rest that remaineth for the people of God ! There is the inheritance of the Saints, who, having here no continuing city, seek one to come ! How splendid is such a destiny for man ! How stupendous is this reward of virtue ! “ Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes ; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain : for the former things are passed away.”

Well might the Apostle say, “ Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” These promised rewards of the righteous man, leave him nothing more to desire. He is admitted to the honors and privileges of the everlasting Covenant ; the Arm of Omnipotence is his

defence ; his daily bread is secured to him, by the faithfulness of God, and the tendency of his virtues ; and after death, he will enjoy the vision of the Almighty, and an immortal life in the heavenly land which is very far off. What would he have more ? This world ? Let him wait a little and he shall have a better. Give him this, and he would lose both. Would he have exemption from sufferings ? Let him wait awhile and he shall have it. Give it now and he must forego that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, which they shall work out for him. Every thing in his present lot, is a portion assigned to him by unerring wisdom, and boundless love ; and the portion that awaits him, is a gift worthy of the infinite God. What could he have more ?

III. You will have anticipated me, my Brethren, in the reflection, that the character which we have sketched, has been exemplified among us, in the person of an eminent servant of God, now departed ; and in the confident hope, that He, who, in his wise providence, has taken from us the bright example, has exalted him to this reward. A public notice, in this community, of his virtues, and services, is a becoming expression

of that sympathy which all must feel, for friends united to us by the ties of religion, whom to know is to esteem and love; and to whom this public loss, is a personal and painful bereavement. A proper respect to the memory of just men, may indeed be considered as a religious duty. The christian graces, as illustrated by their lives and actions, reflect honor upon our religion; and may serve as a guide and encouragement to such as aspire to wisdom and virtue. To the young especially, they are useful, as showing wherein true greatness consists, and how sincere happiness may be attained. It is to subserve these purposes, and not merely to add my feeble suffrage to the applauses of a nation, that I now address you. Genius and eloquence will bring flowers to strew upon his grave;—be it our humble task to inquire, what profitable lessons we may learn, from a life of virtue, and a christian death.

The late patroon of Albany, the Hon. STEPHEN VAN RENSSELAER, was a descendant of one of the most ancient and distinguished families of this country. He was born in the city of New-York, in 1764. Left an orphan at a tender age, the formation of his early character devolv-

ed upon his pious mother, and faithfully did she discharge her sacred trust. He finished his education in the University of Cambridge; where he graduated in 1782. He came into possession of his large patrimonial estate, at his majority; and soon after married MARGARET, daughter of Gen. Philip Schuyler; by whom he had one son, the present Gen. Stephen Van Rensselaer. On her decease, he formed a second connexion with CORNELIA, daughter of the late Judge Paterson, of New-Jersey. This Lady is the mother of six sons and three daughters; all of whom survive.

Placed by his ample fortune, and personal qualities, in a conspicuous position in society, the political distinctions which other men coveted, sought him. The integrity of principle, solidity of judgment, and benignity of disposition, evinced in the discharge of the numerous trusts confided to him, while they conciliated his opponents, won the confidence of his country. His character presenting a mark too bright for detraction to sully, and too high for envy to reach, was respected by all, even in the heat of party strife. No one could doubt the purity of his principles. No one ever formed a pretext for im-

peaching them. He was a man whom all delighted to honor. He commenced his political career, at the early age of 22, as a member of the popular branch of the Legislature of this State. He was subsequently a member of the Senate; and afterwards as Lieutenant-Governor presided over the deliberations of that body for six years. At later periods he was a member of the Convention for revising the Constitution of this State; and a Representative in Congress. On the breaking out of the late war with Great Britain, he promptly responded to the call of his country, and relinquishing the endearments of home, took command as a Major-General of the Militia, on the Niagara frontier. A Statesman, capable of taking just and enlarged views of social policy; and preferring the permanent prosperity of the State, to the fickle popularity of the hour; he stood forth with Clinton and Morris, among the earliest friends of that system of internal improvement, which has enriched this state, and given an impulse to the spirit of public enterprize throughout the Union. He was a member of the first Board of canal Commissioners; and on the removal of Mr. Clinton became its President, in which capa-

capacity he continued to serve to the close of his life. He was an active and munificent patron of literature ; and for many years promoted the cause of education, as one of the Regents of the University. On the decease of the former Chancellor, Lieutenant Gov. Taylor, he was elevated to that office, and presided in that body until his death. In whatever way he has been called to serve his country, his probity, his practical wisdom, and disinterested patriotism, have shed lustre upon his high stations ; while his blameless and benevolent life have attracted to him the esteem and love of all who were admitted to his intimacy. In public life, his character was that described by the Prophet. “He walked righteously, and spake uprightnesses ; he despised the gain of oppressions and shook his hands from holding of bribes.”

As a *Christian*, Mr. Van Rensselaer appears in a still more attractive and enviable light. His piety towards God, was the distinguishing excellence of his character, and the foundation of every other. It was because he feared God, that he knew no other fear. It was the love of God that made him a philanthropist. He learned of Christ to be meek and lowly in heart. Re-

ligion was the guiding light that led him onward and upward, in the ever brightening path of the just. Piety and virtue were the defences that shielded his youth; the adornments that graced his manhood; and the seeds of the harvest that enriched his age. These made his influence a blessing to his country; his name an honor to his species; and his memory a more precious legacy than his princely fortune.

In his case, as in every other where such fruits appear, the seeds of grace were sown in early life. Watered by maternal counsels and prayers, they imbibed the full strength of the generous soil. A diligent reader of the Bible, and a constant observer of his private devotions, he became, by necessary consequence, a firm and consistent believer in the Christian Religion. At what time he became a communicant in the Dutch Reformed Church, is not known to me, but he is believed to have done so very early in life. Unalloyed by fanaticism, or bigotry, his piety was of that healthful kind, which could withstand the numerous temptations incident to his condition. Many, perhaps most men, would have found in his youth, and wealth, and in the blandishments of gaiety

and pleasure, which usually attend on them, an apology for the errors to which they furnish so many enticements. No such weakness, to call it by no harsher name, attached to the beautiful character which we are contemplating. Proof alike against the deceiving sorceries of sin, and the corrupting force of circumstances,—ease, opulence, and security, do not appear to have relaxed the moral discipline of his mind ; or caused him to forget his duties and responsibilities. This is not to be regarded as a merely negative virtue : There is more moral greatness in the triumph of virtuous principles over the well-circumstanced, never-ceasing temptation, than in the courage that conquers cities, or even the magnanimity that embraces the stake. He achieved this triumph ; and surrounded by every misguiding influence, he made a straight path for his feet, from which pleasure could not seduce him. Caressed and flattered by the world, he still walked humbly with God. Possessing a fortune, ample as the wish of avarice, he did not make gold his hope, or say to the fine gold, thou art my confidence ; but he sought a better inheritance that would endure, when this should have passed

away. But let us give God, and not man, the glory: He did indeed stop his ears to the voice of the charmer, and shut his eyes to her attractions; but his security he owed to a strength not his own: "His place of defence was the munitions of Rocks."

The grace which shielded his youth, shone with its mildest, holiest lustre in the domestic circle. Too often pleasure erects her shrine in the mansion of opulence; and God is forgotten where the world affords so secure a dependance. But in that Mansion the Altar of God was set up; and religion added her hallowed comforts, to means of enjoyment, to which the world had nothing more to contribute. A daily service of devotion was performed in the presence of his family; and the most assiduous care bestowed upon their religious instruction. The duties of religion he inculcated by example, as well as by precept; and the life which he commended to his children, he lived before them. Possessing the spirit of his Master, every fruit of that spirit was evinced in his daily conversation. Simple in his tastes and habits, he enjoyed his affluence with exemplary moderation. Gentle and unassuming

in his manners, none were ever less injured by prosperity; none could have worn his honors more meckly. The warm and affectionate dispositions of his heart, which blessed his household, and sweetened his social intercourse, remained to the last, unquenched by sickness, pain and age. He was gentle without weakness; dignified without pride; and strict without severity. The charms of his private character, and the beauty of his domestic manners, while they endeared him to the numerous circle that surrounded that bright centre, won the admiration of all who approached it. They who saw "the Saint, the Husband, and the Father," presiding at his fireside, point to that scene of virtue and happiness, as one where religion wore her brightest aspect; and domestic love mingled her sweetest cup. Such a fire-side is a school of virtue.— Good cause have his children to remember, "the kind counsel, and sweet society of such a father." Happy are the children who shall follow his faultless example!

The religion of Mr. Van Rensselaer was of a highly beneficent character. His princely income was liberally appropriated to works of

piety and mercy. Kind and lenient in his dealings with his numerous tenantry, he will long be remembered by them, as one who “despised the gain of oppressions.” His bounties flowed abroad in numerous and steady streams, and few are the benevolent enterprizes of this country, which have not sought and obtained them.— Churches with limited means have leaned upon his annual contributions. Indigent young men, in pursuit of an education, have found him a friend in need. The chief Bible and Missionary Societies of our land, enrolled his name among their officers, and most liberal patrons. Although he was especially interested in the religious and charitable institutions, under the control of the orthodox Congregational, and Presbyterian churches; his catholic spirit and diffusive charities were confined by no sectarian limits. His name, his purse, and his influence were regarded, in some sort, as the common property of the Church of Christ in all its branches, and the common resource of every enterprize conducing to the moral welfare of man. To the poor his alms were given freely, and without ostentation. In doing good he sought to escape observation, as most

men do to attract it. None but the few, from whom it could not be concealed, can be aware of the extent to which he carried this silent and unobtrusive work of benevolence. It is pleasing to reflect, that one of the last acts of his life, was to send forth his Almoner on his accustomed errand of mercy. His was pre-eminently that “wisdom which is from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.” Observed by all eyes, loved by all hearts, the object of the gratitude of the unfortunate, and the reverence of the good;—he could have said with Job, and perhaps no man ever lived, who could have said more truly—“When the ear heard me then it blessed me, and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness and it clothed me; my judgment was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the

poor, and the cause which I knew not, I searched out."

In prosperity, that piety may serve to content the conscience, which will prove wholly insufficient for the day of trial. But this excellent man had built his house upon the Rock, and when trouble came, it was steadfast. Springing from a living and vigorous faith, his religion had struck its roots into the heart. It was like a tree planted by the rivers of water—its leaves were fair, and its fruits much. As might have been expected, the branch that had bent with fruits of mercy, when it was well with him, shed comforts in his adversity. The God whom he had loved in his youth, and served with his matured faculties, and honored with his substance, proved his "shield and exceeding great reward," when wealth and fame, and assiduous love, were found powerless to soothe pain, or avert death. It was needful, that, like his divine Master, he should be made perfect through sufferings; and months of debility and anguish were ordained to cloud the evening of his life. This period was improved to perfect that which was lacking; and set his house in order for his departure. Secluded from

the world, he devoted himself to holy meditation and prayer ; and became like a sheaf ripened for the garner of God. He declared that he had no desire to recover ; that he was afraid of the world, and dreaded going back to it again. Having “the comfort of a reasonable, religious and holy hope,” he feared not to walk through the valley and shadow of death ; but being subject to severe paroxysms of pain, he was wont to pray, that it might please God to grant him a tranquil death. The prayer was answered. Disrobed of his terrors, the angel of death stole upon him with a noiseless step. He felt the icy, but gentle touch of the messenger, and bowing his head upon his bosom, calmly asked, “is not this dying?” and fell asleep !

I shall close this notice of his decease, in the words of one of his sons*—“There is much cause for gratitude in having so long enjoyed the kind counsel, and sweet society of such a father ; and although, in the natural course of events, there was no reason to expect that his earthly pilgrimage could long continue, still the separation is painful beyond the power of language to ex-

• H. Van Rensselaer, Esq.

press. But it is consoling to reflect that the change was most happy for him. Racked by the agonizing pains of disease, he had long looked forward to death with pleasure. It was a happy death! He fell asleep in Jesus; and the flight of his spirit was so gentle, as to escape the observation of the watching eyes of his children. Blessed spirit; it is with the spirits of just men made perfect. It may with truth be said of my father—‘Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace.’ His death presents to the mind the image of the faithful servant who was found watching at the unexpected time—of the wise virgins, hearing the cry at midnight—‘Behold the Bridegroom cometh!’ and going forth at once to meet him with a bright and steady flame. ‘Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!’”

In such a life and such a death, there are grounds of abundant consolation to his surviving friends. It may be painful to reflect that one so rich in good works, has been taken from a field where so much is to be done;—But we must not complain that the Master has called the laborer to give him his hire. Other laborers will supply his

place. Other hands will dispense his bounties. We might grieve to think that one so full of the kindest affections, has been torn from the bosoms that loved him ; and that he shall see the face of lover and friend no more on earth. But he has gone to the bosom of One who loves him more than spouse or child can love ; and now “ *his eyes behold the King in his beauty.*” It might seem a hardship that the fair possessions which he had so beneficially employed, should, in one brief moment, pass away from him, as a dream when one awaketh ! But what is that loss to him ?—Less than the small dust of the balance. He has gone to “ *the land that is very far off.*” Heir of an endless life, imperishable wealth, unfading honor, he has entered upon his inheritance.—Here the arms that embraced could not succour him ; but there he reposes in eternal safety in the bosom of God. Here, wasted with sickness and pain, nor wisdom, nor wealth, nor affection, could call back departed joys ; but there, associated with the holy ones, he dwells a rejoicing spirit before the throne ; and ceasing to suffer and grieve, he has become like one of the Angels—beautiful as virtue, and deathless as immortality !

Rich in instruction, as well as comfort, we may learn from the life and death of this just man, the true use of riches, and how valueless they are for any other purposes, than those for which they are expressly entrusted to us. They are talents lent, but not given ; and are to be employed for God's purposes, and not our own. Attended as they are, by great temptations and responsibilities, they are a perilous possession to those who misapply them. But as the means of promoting truth, virtue, and happiness among men, they are of priceless value. What sweet satisfactions are they not competent to buy, when used to alleviate the pressure of virtuous poverty, to dry the orphan's tears, and shed the light of love upon the dark habitations of cruelty ? If now these works of mercy yield,

“ What nothing earthly gives, or can destroy ;
The soul's calm sunshine, and the heart-felt joy,”

what will be their reward, when the gifts lent to the Lord shall be paid again ; and the little boons granted to charity, shall become treasures of durable riches in the kingdom of Heaven ! For every other purpose they are worse than useless. What can it avail to employ a wealth already

useless, as the source of still more useless gains ; or as the instrument of a bootless oppression ; or as the price of superfluous pleasures, that cannot be enjoyed ; or of honors that must be worn with contempt ? But whatever they may add to the present enjoyments of life, riches can profit nothing in the day of wrath. What are the treasures that can soothe the pains of sickness ? What is the price that can buy peace for a wounded conscience ? What bribe can delay death ; or redeem a wasted day of salvation ? What gifts can pacify eternal justice ; or open the doors of that final prison-house ? What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul ? What did riches benefit him who had goods laid up for many years, when his soul was required of him ? Or him who was clad in purple and fine linen, when he opened his eyes in hell being in torments ? Oh ! my friends, had wealth, and station, and domestic joy, and the homage of the world, constituted the only portion of him who hath now left them all behind, could we have deemed him *the happy man* ? Alas ! how poor had he been this day !—his pomp

brought down to the grave, and the awful retributions of eternity descending upon his defenceless soul!

Finally, in the life and character before us, there are examples of virtue, and lessons of wisdom, beautiful to contemplate, and replete with instruction. Behold the happy influence of parental piety upon the fortunes of children! It was the care and diligence of a goodly mother, that formed the rudiments of his character; and laid the foundations of his fame and happiness. His own examples have already descended in blessings on the heads of his children; and all of them, it is believed, have come to the holy communion of the Christian Church, but the young adventurer on a distant ocean. That child of a Father's prayers, will come too in his season. Consider the advantages of early religion. How safely their feet walk who never learn to stray! How steadily their path brightens! See to what heights of happiness and honor it conducts them! What strength and consistency those virtuous principles acquire, which have entwined themselves with all the affections of the youthful

bosom! Observe with what graces they adorn the life; what joys they give to the heart; and how sweet they make the memory of the just. The example of this servant of God is every way worthy of our imitation. The wealth and influence which fell to his lot, are not among the talents intrusted to us. But the traits of character which constituted his moral greatness lie within our reach. If young, we may like him, give our youth to innocency and virtue. We may cherish the high and holy principles of honor and religion, which made him what he was. We may consecrate our talents, our exertions, our resources, to our God, our church, and our country. Like him, we may be just, pure, benevolent,—fearing God, and eschewing evil. If we do this, though our virtues may not make us rich in worldly goods, they will make us rich towards God. They may not make us illustrious, but they will make us happy. We may still die unknown to fame—unwept by a nation's tears; but our death shall be precious in the sight of God; and that award which the Righteous Judge shall give, may make us, in another life,

his equals in honor and bliss. *We shall “die the death of the righteous, and our last end shall be like his.”—“Our eyes shall see the King in his beauty ; they shall behold the land that is very far off !”*





